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DOCUMENTS

The CIA, under prodding from Congress, today agreed to establish a new program to declassify historical documents.

Meanwhile, the Senate Intelligence Committee approved unanimously and sent to the full Senate a bill designed to ease the burden on the CIA of public requests for access to intelligence papers and data.

The simultaneous actions represent related attempts to respond to CIA complaints that public requests for documents under the Freedom of Information Act were overwhelming and to congressional concerns that public access to important CIA papers not be unduly restricted.

A spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union welcomed the new CIA declassification program for historical papers and expressed qualified support for the committee-approved bill.

The organization, which lobbies on civil rights and free speech issues, still had problems with the legislation but believed it reflected substantial progress over earlier versions, an ACLU spokesman said.

CIA Director William Casey agreed to establish the new declassification program at the urging of Minnesota Republican David Durenberger, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"It would demonstrate your commitment to openness in the things that matter while continuing to safeguard that which must remain secret," Durenberger told Casey.

Casey said the program would focus on 20-30 year old files.

Of the Senate bill, Kentucky Democrat Walter Huddleston said: "I am satisfied it will serve both the CIA's operational interests and the public's right to have as much information as possible about their government."

The ACLU was particularly pleased by an amendment to the bill ensuring that people with evidence of the CIA's improperly classifying files could ask a court to review the matter, a spokesman said.

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